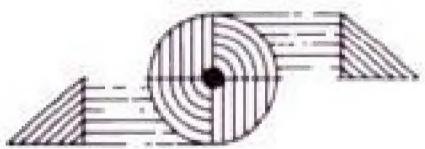


OF DERRIDA, HEIDEGGER, AND SPIRIT

Edited and
with an Introduction by
David Wood



**Northwestern University Press
Evanston, Illinois 60208-4210**

**Copyright © 1993 Northwestern University Press
All rights reserved
Printed in the United States of America**

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Of Derrida, Heidegger, and spirit / edited by David Wood.

**p. cm. — (Northwestern University studies in phenomenology
and existential philosophy)**

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 0-8101-1068-7. — ISBN 0-8101-1093-8 (pbk.)

**1. Derrida, Jacques. *De l'esprit*. 2. Heidegger, Martin,
1889-1976. 3. Derrida, Jacques. 4. Spirit. I. Wood, David (David
C.) II. Series : Northwestern University studies in phenomenology &
existential philosophy.**

B3279.H49D4836 1993

193—dc20

93-8224

CIP

**The paper used in this publication meets the minimum requirements of the
American National Standard for Information Sciences—Permanence of Paper
for Printed Library Materials, ANSI Z39.48-1984.**

Spirit and Teeth

Nick Land

A Preliminary Post-Mortem

Spirit (*Geist*) is stigmatized by a multiple deconstructibility: as a substantialization of Dasein, an antonym of matter, a correlate of phonic lucidity, or a token of reflexivity, self-presence, pure intelligibility, spontaneity, etc. In the course of its recent history this word has been inflated by Hegel into the cosmic medium of transaction—the super-heated lubricant of global eventuation—and then trafficked to the edge of worthlessness by the culture succeeding him, before finally succumbing to an irreparable marginalization by the scientific advances of experimental and behavioral psychology, neurology, neuroanatomy, cognitive science, cybernetics, artificial intelligence, until it becomes a sentimentalism, a vague peripheralized metaphor, a joke . . . a cheap target one might think. There are those who remain loyal enough to the canonical discourses of Western philosophy to argue that logocentrism is secreted in the implementary terminology of information, digitality, program, software, and control. But as for *spirit!*—that can only be parody or nostal-

gia. Who could still use such a word without humor or disdain? Spirit is less a misleading or dangerous word than a ridiculous one; a Coelecanth of a word. Yet it persists: the mark of a clownish incompetence at death.

Such incompetence has its doctrine, rituals, and liturgy, its orthodoxies and heresies. It is the entire and prolonged refusal of the impersonal summarizable as "phenomenology." Whether high-church (Hegel), or low-church (Husserl), phenomenology is the definitive ideology of propriety; systematically employing the interrogative mode in order to distill out everything for which proper subjectivity cannot claim responsibility, and thus entrenching the humanistic dimension of Western philosophy ever more rigidly. This entire current gradually compiles an attempted proof of the impossibility of death, an ontological conflation of access to reality and ownership (*psyché, cogito, Selbstheit, Eigentlichkeit, Jemeinigkeit*), a perpetually reformulated spiritualism. Socrates, Descartes, Husserl: all shallow, all egoists, all pressing further into the flatlands of the profane. This is why they are so well placed to profit from the death of God (an event in which they had taken no part, on the contrary; the obsessional egoism of theism had always appealed to them). Phenomenology is a programmatic denial (reduction to the personal) of exteriority which, after becoming a quasisolipsistic knee-jerk of self-assertion, wonders with genuine naivety why alterity has come to pose such problems. If spirit largely disappears between Hegel and Husserl it is because, compared to the transcendental ego, it seems a little too complicit with the outside.

Unlike Heidegger and Derrida, I see no advance, recovery, or sophification taking place in the Husserlian reading of Kant. The phenomenological reduction of appearance (*Erscheinung*) to evidential *Schein* is a dogmatic decision which defangs the tentative skepticism of the critical philosophy, taking it even further from the deep *epoché* of unknowing: the vast abrupt discovered confusedly by Pyrrho of Elis, the repressed of monotheistic civilization. Husserlian suspension or bracketing is not Pyrrhonian but Socratic; a reservation of judgment that is subordinated to apodicticity, to knowing what one knows even if nothing else (to doubting as a power of the subject). *Epoché, chaos, Old Night, death, however it/she is named, the way there is not our doing. Suspension is to be discovered, not performed.*

So what is to be thought of a *diffrance* that radicalizes, deconstructs, or subverts a suspension thus crushed under a phenomenological dogmatics? What is it that would take us this way, if not that which *appears* (in Kant's sense, not Husserl's) as the humanistic pretension—the spirit—of representational philosophizing? Such suspension is of

course a detour, an avoidance, but scarcely an inevitable one. On the contrary, it is peculiarly deliberated; meticulously valorizing a specific philosophic tendency (passing through Husserl), effacing another (the Schopenhauerean fork of post-Kantianism), and painstakingly transferring signs from the latter to the former (Nietzsche read through Heidegger!!!). Section 7 of *Sein und Zeit* is exemplary here, with its insistence upon an evidential reading of phenomenality, thereby dismissing the entire problematic of Nietzsche's thinking in a single casual gesture. What sense to the insistent theme of fiction in Nietzsche's writings after such a move has been made? What sense to enigma? (We always already have the meaning of being built into the structure of existence, Heidegger suggests, it is merely that we do not yet know that we know. Questioning is remembering. Socrates smiles.)

We do not know *yet*, a not yet that can be dilated corrosively; frustrating the end of metaphysics, interminably deferring truth. Yawns become scarcely controllable. Does it matter what we know or will never know? Let us not forget that philosophy is also primate psychology; that our loftiest speculations are merely picking through a minuscule region of the variegated slime encrusting a speck of dust. An obsessional concern for such insignificances is a tasteless parochialism. What matters is the Unknown: the escapistographic matrix echoed spectrally by the negative prefix, sprawled in immense indifference to all our "yets." Beyond the anthropoid gesticulations of knowing, suspension is not differentiable from death, and death ("one's death" as we so ludicrously say) does not belong to an order that can be delayed. Has our Socratism reached such a pinnacle of profanity that we really imagine she would wait for us?

Part I: Wolves

As I continue to study this text, elsewhere, with a more decent patience, I hope one day to be able, beyond what a conference permits me today, to render it justice in also analysing its motion, its mode or its status (if it has one), its relation to philosophical discourse, to hermeneutics or poetics, but still what it says of *Geschlecht*, the word *Geschlecht*, and also of place (*Ort*), as of animality. For the moment [*l'instant*], I follow solely the passage of spirit. (DE, 137/87)

These are the words of a man who is confident he will survive for some considerable time. There is no discernible urgency here, far less abrupt-

ness, desperation, or any of the raw intensities of haste. Instead there is the now familiar rhetoric of close reading; the simultaneous performance and prescription of painstaking care, deliberation, conscientiousness, and reverential textual devotion. A certain intricately intertextual discussion of spirit unfolds, at a langorous pace, inspired by uninterrogated principles of decency and justice. Everything is mediated by elucidations, re-elucidations, elucidations of previous elucidations, conducted with meticulous courtesy, but never inattentive to the complicity of the concept of elucidation with the history of metaphysics from Plato to the previous paragraph of *De l'esprit*. Our author is not to be hurried into premature pronouncements on matters of such seriousness as philosophical discourse, hermeneutics, or poetics. Nor is he prepared to descend into such overenthusiastic crudity as examining more than one of Heidegger's words in a single book. Last of all, as it has so often tended to be, comes a promise to take seriously the problem of animality, which—God and suchlike spiritual primordialities being willing—should come to be written about one day.

It is probably relatively uncontroversial to conclude from all this that Derrida is not a werewolf. Werewolves are dissipated within a homolupic spiral that distances them utterly from all concern for decency or justice. Their feral physiologies are badly adapted to the depressive states conducive to ethical earnestness. Instead they are propelled by extremities of libidinal tension which fragment their movements, break up their tracks with jagged discontinuities, and infest their nerves with a burning *malaise*, so that each gesture is baked in a kiln of ferocity. Creatures of epidemic rather than hermeneutics, werewolves tend to be very crude, but then, they don't live as long as deconstructionists. The luxury of delaying the problem of animality is not open to them.

On page 141 of *De l'esprit* Derrida apologizes for a very moderate instance of textual impoliteness that he describes as "precipitating in an indecent fashion" (*DE*, 141/89). In this thought of "indecent precipitation" he comes closer to the dominant impulse of Trakl's poetry than at any other point in the book, closer too, it could be argued, than Heidegger ever gets. An evasion that is perhaps constitutive of hermeneutical decency is exemplified when, by taking one's time over interpreting Trakl's poetry, one avoids succumbing to the pestilence it communicates. Trakl's writings are lycanthropic vectors of impatience, of twitch disease, because they are the virulent relics of an indecent precipitation, an abortion, a meteorite impact. Trakl took very little time over anything. Surviving as he did to the age of twenty-seven he had very little time to take.

Trakl confesses to his lycanthropy in the first version of *Passion*, the unavowed version, where he writes that:

Two wolves in the sinister wood
We mixed our blood in a stony embrace
And the stars of our race fell upon us. (*T*, 216)

The word “race” in this translation precipitates the sense of *Geschlecht* in an indecent fashion. In the complete absence of hermeneutical conscientiousness it is epidemiological factors alone which compel this. To become a werewolf one must be bitten by another werewolf, and in Trakl’s case it seems this was Rimbaud, who wrote: “It is quite evident to me that I have always been of an inferior race. I am not able to comprehend revolt. My race never stirs itself except for pillage: like wolves at the beast they have not killed” (*R*, 302).

To be a werewolf is to be inferior by the most basic criteria of civilization. Not only is the discipline of political responsibility alien to them, so is the entire history of work in which such discipline is embedded. Rimbaud remarks, starkly enough: “I have a horror of all trades.” In general, it can be said that this race is marked by a profound spiritual inferiority. Compared to the piety, morality, and industriousness of its superiors it exhibits only laziness, disobedience, and an abnormally unsuccessful repression of all those traits of the unconscious which Freud describes as “resistant to education,” and among which there is nothing remotely associated with either decency or justice: “I have never been of this people; I have never been a christian; I am of the race who sings under torture; I do not understand the laws, I am a brute” (*R*, 308).

Such is Trakl’s “accursed race” (*T*, 82) as well as Rimbaud’s, communicating its dirty blood in wilderness spaces of barbarian inarticulacy. Eternally aborting the prospect of a transcendental subjectivity, the inferior ones are never captured by contractual reciprocity, or by its attendant moral universalism. They are no more employable than they are psychoanalyzable, oblivious to both legality and incentive. Incapable of making promises—even to themselves—they are excluded from every possibility of salvation. The craving for such pagan regressions is unspeakable. It is only with the greatest strictness that the superior ones repress the violent drives which lure them into inferior becomings; becoming female, black, irresponsible and nomadic, becoming an animal, a plant, a death spasm of the sun.

In its final phase the Austro-Hungarian Empire became a machine for the generation of homolupic becomings; brewing intense tra-

jectories of regression among the slavic races of the Balkans and Carpathians, translating them into German, and then condensing them under the pressure of exacerbated repression in the Viennese culture-core. What exploded in the hysterias of Freud's patients was an irresistible vulcanism of becoming inferior, whose petrified lava flows mapped-out the regressive character of the drive. The migrant blocks of tension summarized in the Freudian unconscious are much less a matter of Oedipus than of the mongols; of those who feed the world of spirit to their horses as they inundate civilization like a flood. If the unconscious is structured like a language it is only because language has the pattern of a plague.

Among Trakl's writing's are two war poems, and perhaps only two. One is *Grodek*—named after the battlefield upon which the Austro-Hungarian army suffered a major defeat in the early stages of the conflict—and is perhaps the most widely known of Trakl's writings. It is this poem that includes the line so important to both Heidegger and Derrida concerning “the hot flame of spirit” (T, 95). The other is entitled *In the East*, and sketches the same libidinal figure in the First World War as Freud's writings of the two ensuing decades. This figure traces the displacement of impersonal primary-process aggression against the self-God-city complex—against civilization—onto the far more restrained axis of armed competition between nations. War sublimates the lycanthropic death-wave in the same way a dream sublimates unavowable desire; allowing something to remain asleep. In this sense *In the East* is the undoing of a war poem, and has the nightmare quality associated with something peeled-back; such as the disintegration of flesh from a skull, or the opening of a corpse to reveal an obscenely teeming mass. This movement of violent disillusionment is starkly outlined in the poem *Confitor*:

And as the masks fall from each thing
I see only anxiety, despair, ignominy and epidemic,
The tragedy of humanity has no heroes,
A vile piece, played out on graves and corpses. (T, 147)

The second stanza of *In the East* ends with the spirits of the stricken—of the *erschlagenen*, close perhaps to a *Geschlecht*—sighing among the shadows of autumnal ashes, and to this point *In the East* might still be a war poem. It would still be possible for the ego to savor these stanzas for the sublimation-trap they lay for impersonal thanatropisms,

offering up the victims of inhibited conflicts as a mournful dream-image. The third and final stanza, however, is something quite different:

Thorny wilderness girdles the city
From bloody steps the moon hunts
Terrified women.
Wild wolves break through the gate. (*T*, 94)

The wild, the basis of a noun in the first line of the stanza, returns as an adjective in its last. An indeterminate multiplicity of wolves effect a rupture in the boundary of the city, transmitting its positive exteriority into its kernel. No longer interpretable as politics, as a war between cities, states, or other civilized totalities, the violence of the East relapses into an unrestrained movement of erosion. Blood, the moon, and women are coagulated by an intense menstrual seism which shatters the proper difference between life and death, integrity and dissolution, periodicity and shock. What Trakl in *Grodek* names “the forgotten blood” recovers its sacred sense, in the regression that transmutes the politico-ethically impregnated blood of the dying solder into savage categorially oblivious flow.

Wild matter is untouched by its difference from spirit, insofar as this is supposed to depend upon a logical disjunction. The pseudointeriorities of the city are no less permeable to it than the uncultivated spaces marked out by the civilized ones for its exile. The bloody steps (*Stufen*) of *In the East* are only one variant among the many found in Trakl’s writings: “steps of madness” (*T*, 43), “mossy steps,” “ruined steps,” “the steps of the wood” (*T*, 54). It is a language of gradation, degree, *Abstufung*. Not quantity as opposed to quality, nor the difference of the two, but heterogenous strata of intensity, which—like the scales of the chaos theorists—involve irresolvable complexity, diversity, indefinite protractability in both directions, the default of absolute thresholds, an economics of incommensurability, and a compulsively recurrent abortion of the concept. Essence is preempted by an irresolvable excess of detail, in the same eruptive gesture that lethally infects transcendence with the return of excitatory complexity. The great simplicities of culture—identity, equality, absoluteness, abstraction—are immanently subverted by the pathological mass of unsublatable ingredients. There is no concept of particularity that is not theological; aligned with the phantasm of a transcendent spirit that stands disjoined from the ineliminable materiality of all spiritualization processes—to steal Nietzsche’s term.

That matter is volatilized to different degrees of spiritualization is not in the least dependent upon spiritual causalities of any kind. Between the wilderness and the polis is a wilderness history—a genealogy—and not a political history. Regression is not an undoing of the city's work, but a recurrence of impersonal creativity. More precisely, the work of the city has never been anything but a mendacious retranscription of the real metamorphoses which reemerge in lycanthropic becomings.

Inferiority is not any kind of lack or impoverishment, but a positive libidinal charge potentiating spiritualizations. Anything that slumbers in the sterility of pseudoabsoluteness is right to fear the inferior ones, and the powerful regressions that wash away the ramparts damming-up intensive sequences. The accursed race, living like beasts, whose veins are inflamed by a cosmic menstruation, have never entered into the great project of civilization, which begins with the use of fire to keep the wild animals at bay. Instead they leave a scorched and blackened trail in their wake as they irresponsibly protract the trajectory of animality. In their hands fire itself loses itself; becoming dirty, epidemic, and regressive. Not for them the humanizing, nucleating fire; the hearth, the protective and nutritive glow, a focus embracing difference within itself, the fire of the familial and the familiar. The fire of the inferior ones is the dissolvent blaze which spreads uncontrollably, combusting the gloomy architectures of transcendence in the mad truth of exteriority. It is the fire of waste, dissipation, dehumanization, of a deeper and harsher fertility than can be comprehended by the industry of man. This lupine fire—the apolitical element in war, literature, psychosis, and catastrophe—makes space for the impersonal propagations of the wilderness.

An abrupt question: Was Trakl a Christian? Yes, of course, at times he becomes a Christian, among a general confusion of becomings—becoming an animal, becoming a virus, becoming inorganic—just as he was also an antichrist, a poet, a pharmacist, an alcoholic, a drug addict, a psychotic, a leper, a suicide, an incestuous cannibal, a necrophiliac, a rodent, a vampire, and a werewolf. Just as he became his sister, and also a hermaphrodite. Trakl's texts are scrawled over by redemptionist monotheism, just as they are stained by narcotic fluidities, gnawed by rats, cratered by Russian artillery, charred and pitted by astronomical debris. Trakl was a Christian and an atheist and also a Satanist, when he wasn't simply undead, or in some other way inhuman. It is perhaps more precise to say that Trakl never existed, except as a battlefield, a reservoir of disease, the graveyard of a deconsecrated church, as something expiring from a massive cocaine overdose on the floor of a

military hospital, cheated of lucidity by the searing onslaught of base difference.

Part II: Rats

Henrik Ibsen knew some things about rats, "they who are hated and persecuted of men" (*Ib*, 49). The fact of an alliance between rats and desire was evident to him, and when the rat wife of *Little Eyolf* is asked where her beloved is, she answers: "Down among all the rats" (*Ib*, 49). How deftly he indicates the registration of the rats upon the Oedipal claustrophobia of the bourgeois household:

Rat Wife: [curtsies at the door] Begging your most humble pardon, ladies and gentlemen . . . but have you anything gnawing at this house?

Allmers: Have we . . . ? No, I don't think so.

Rat Wife: Because if you had I'd be glad to help you get rid of it.

Rita: Yes, yes, we understand. But we don't have anything of that kind. (*Ib*, 46)

How desperate they are not to believe it! "Rats don't belong here, this is the inside, purity, civilization, philosophy . . . we don't want to know about anything of *that kind*."

Reading is not one thing. It is always possible to construe the movement between strata, plates, terraces, in spiritual terms; a matter of simulacrum, representation, metaphor, commentary, and interpretation. God is like and unlike a man, who is like and unlike an animal, which is like and unlike inorganic matter. This is an architecture of super-terrestrial transitions, transcendental difference, absolute verticality, gulfs of essence, logicized, infinitized, purifying disjunction. There is not one alternative to such a schema, but a recklessly proliferated multiplicity of alternatives; complex sponge-spaces rotted by lines of insinuation. There is always a dimension of immanence; a burrow, a thread, a path for contagion. The storeys of a house lend themselves to social stratification, and thus to philosophical and theological metaphor; the basement representing the place of the servants, animality, the unconscious. What is repressed in this case is not the basement itself—hell is not repressed but exhibited—but the hollow walls, the drainpipe outside, the arterial sys-

tem of tubes, ducts, and vents, everything that facilitates the corruption of vertically articulated space by the quasihorizontality of an insidious dimension. Laws, revelations, and prayers, or—at a lower level—commands, messages, and reports, seem to establish the defined relations between strata that are identical with justice. The words of God pass down from level to level, determinately mediated at each stage. Inherent to such spatiality is its subversion, a more basic and complex order of distances, because Heaven is not without its ratholes, its sewage system, an entire impersonal architecture characterized by porous heterogeneity. It seems likely that God would insist upon air-conditioning and a dumbwaiter. Irrespective of his celestial visage, Jahweh still has ratbites on his ass.

Neither Heidegger nor Derrida have any time for Trakl's rats, but that doesn't stop them swarming everywhere, exaggerating the lycanthropic power of infiltration. It must be admitted; the rats are not very spiritual, but if there is a site, *Ort*, that focuses Trakl's poetry, why is it not the courtyard that Trakl repeatedly populates with rats? Are not the rats, as a positive antilyricism, crucial to Trakl's poetic force? Why does Heidegger never mention Trakl's superb poem *The Rats*, a text that functions as a vermin-core for an entire pattern of infestation? Perhaps it is because difference becomes unacceptable when it moves fast and unpredictably, hissing at humanity through plague-smeared teeth.

It is certainly not because the rats are indiscernible, despite their unlocalizable fluidity. They shriek, whistle, bicker, rummage, and romp. When the rats erupt into *Dream and Derangement* for instance, which is perhaps Trakl's most shattering and lycanthropic poem, they are not merely glimpsed—far less ignored or exterminated—but encouraged by the poem's central character, who feeds them in a gesture of beautiful treachery against mankind. Not that it is population alone that gives them a special privilege, ravens are equally prevalent within Trakl's writings—and also have a poem of their own—whilst toads and bats are to be found in incredible numbers. It is the rats' hideous talent for decomposing interiorities that advantages them; opening the incest-rotted "house of the father"—and with it the most intensely charged recesses of Trakl's writing—to the depredations of feral alterity.

Despite his humanistic prejudices, Hans Zinsser, in his book *Rats, Lice, and History*, has written delightfully about the rats. He remarks:

It is a curious fact that long before there could have been any knowledge concerning the dangerous character of rodents as

carriers of disease, mankind dreaded and pursued these animals. Sticker has collected a great many references to this subject from ancient and mediæval literature, and has found much evidence in the folklore of mediæval Europe which points to the vague recognition of some connection between plague and rats. In ancient Palestine, the Jews considered all seven mouse varieties (*akbar*) unclean, and as unsuited for human nourishment as were pigs. The worshipers of Zoroaster hated water rats, and believed that the killing of rats was a service to God. It is also significant that Apollo Smintheus, the god who was supposed to protect against disease, was also spoken of as the killer of mice, and saint Gertrude was besought by the bishops of the early Catholic Church to protect against plague and mice. The year 1498, Sticker tells us, was a severe plague year in Germany, and there were so many rats in Frankfurt that an attendant was stationed for several hours each day on a bridge in the town and directed to pay a pfennig for every rat brought in. The attendant cut off the tail of the rat—probably as a primitive method of accounting—and threw the bodies into the river. Heine, according to Sticker, speaks of a tax levied on the Jews of Frankfurt in the fifteenth century, which consisted of the annual delivery of five thousand rat tails. Folklore originating in a number of different parts of Europe during the great plague epidemics mentions cats and dogs, the hereditary enemies of rats and mice, as guardians against plague. (*RLH*, 142-43)

There is enormous power to the dynamic hierarchy of vectors mobilized by the rats. It combines the insidious subtlety of liquids with the concentrated displacement of compact solids; saturation with jumps. Rats carry fleas which bear diseases, augmenting the fluid dissemination of plagues with a ferociously discontinuous transmission. To quote Zinsser again:

Studies made within the last few years seem to indicate that the virus of the Mexican-American type of typhus fever, as well as of the endemic variety in the Mediterranean basin, is highly adapted to rodents and is carried in these animals—rats—during the intervals between human epidemics; transmitted from rat to rat by the rat louse (*Polyplax*) and the rat flea (*Xenopsylla*), and, on suitable occasions, to man from the rat by the rat flea. For this reason, Nicolle speaks of this as the "murine" virus. (*RLH*, 142)

And a little further on:

From the point of view of all other living creatures, the rat is an unmitigated nuisance and pest. There is nothing that can be said in its favor. It can live anywhere and eat anything. It burrows for itself when it has to, but, when it can, it takes over the habitations of other animals, such as rabbits, and kills them and their young. It climbs and swims. It carries disease of man and animals—plague, typhus, trichinella spiralis, rat-bite fever, infectious jaundice, possibly foot-and-mouth disease and a form of equine “influenza.” Its destructiveness is almost unlimited. (*RLH*, 150–51)

The first empirical element to be noted by any libidinal rat theory is the zoological diversification of the rat into two species. These are “*Rattus rattus*, the black, house, or ship-rat, and *Rattus Norvegicus*, the greyish brown, field, or sewer-rat” (*HB*, 7), of which Shrewsbury says in his *History of the Bubonic Plague*: “By comparison with the house-rat it is less agile but far more voracious and cunning, and as it is stronger and more fecund it is a much more formidable enemy of mankind” (*HB*, 8). During the outbreak of bubonic plague during the fourteenth century it was not only the intense killing of human populations, or delivery of terminal vectors, that was executed by *R. rattus*, who lived and propagated in close proximity to humans, but also the long-range dissemination of the plague, as *R. Norvegicus* is not thought to have arrived in Europe before the eighteenth century. If this is true—and current historical zoology gives no positive reason to doubt it—then it can safely be asserted that the black death, in addition to its precursor which raged across the near orient and Europe during the sixth and seventh centuries, will remain the climax of achievement reached by *R. rattus*, who has since been eclipsed.

Zinsser once more:

just as the established civilizations of Northern Europe were swept aside by the mass invasions of barbarians from the East, so the established hegemony of the black rat was eventually wiped out with the incursion of the hordes of the brown rat, or *Mus decumanus*—the ferocious, short-nosed, and short-tailed Asiatic that swept across the Continent in the early eighteenth century. . . .

The brown rat, too, came from the East. It is now known as the “common” rat and, because of a mistaken notion of its ori-

gin, as *Mus norvegicus*. Its true origin, according to Hamilton and Hinton, is probably Chinese Mongolia or the region east of Lake Baikal, in both of which places forms resembling it have been found indigenous. The same writers quote Blasius, who believes that the ancients about the Caspian Sea may have known this rat. Claudio Ælian, a Roman rhetorician of the second century, in his *De Animalium Natura*, speaks of "little less than Ichneumons, making periodical raids in infinite numbers" in the countries along the Caspian, "swimming over rivers holding each other's tails." . . .

Pallas (1831), in his *Zoographia Rosso-Asiatica*, records that in 1727—a mouse year—great masses of these rats swam across the Volga after an earthquake. (RLH, 149)

There are two varieties of rat, but this should not be taken as a gift for our metaphysicians, or supposed antimetaphysicians, who are constantly in search of dichotomic conceptual oppositions. The duality of *R. rattus* and *R. Norvegicus* is of the kind 1, 2, . . . not 0 . . . 1, it encloses nothing, reaches no limits, provides no determination, logical negativity, or alternation. The tokens of libidinal displacement are complex and not diacritical. Alogical differentiation: black and brown, not black and white. One, two . . . first the wave of *R. rattus*, effective on its own, almost invisible to the Europe of the middle ages, differentiated perhaps from the mice (it was called *mures majores* [HB, 121]), . . . 1/2, 1, . . . ? And then the wave of *R. Norvegicus*, a different type of rat, but not an opposite type; rather, a type that was more clever and destructive, taking the rat process a little bit *further*. Far from requiring the black rat for its determinacy the new Asiatic invader wipes out the previous rat population, establishing itself as a sheer intensity, as a potential for disaster. Rats disdain discrimination, propagating their difference upon a plateau of excitement. Differentiation within an illimitable series, alogical dissimilarity, independence from the differend, and indiscriminate proliferation of nonidentity; this is the "logic" of the rats.

Freud's 1909 case of compulsive neurosis—the "rat-man"—is told by his captain, fatefully, of a "particularly terrible Oriental punishment" (F, 43). Freud describes how this was related to him in the analysis: "the condemned is bound (he expressed himself so unclearly that I could not immediately guess [*erraten*] in what position)—upon his posterior a pot was placed, into which rats [*Ratten*] were introduced, which—he stood up again and gave out all the signs of terror and resistance—*bored themselves in*" (F, 44). This is the "rat-punishment" (*die Rattenstrafe*), visited upon Europe, through its underside, from the East. Its

peculiar insidiousness, which Freud does not emphasize even though he marks it, is that to surmise [*erraten*] the riddle [*Rätsel*] of the *Rattenstrafe* is to suffer it. In the very movement of prowess the imperial interpretative gesture is taken *par derrière* by an impersonal libidinal force from beyond representational discourse, whether logico-psychiatric or orientalist. The image of anal violation that organizes the rat-delirium has all the traits of a compromise formation; a sublimation of utter unexpectedness into a linearized passage fortified by a sadistically invested and ego-co-opted sphincter. The infiltration of the rat is singularized, and depicted as an inverse frontal assault, stripped of its fluidity, indirectness, heterogeneity, as if it were mere delicacy that obstructed our comprehension of vermin space. It is not Oedipal ambivalence that is solicited by such an image, but the racist misogyny that would project all undomesticated flows onto an axis of expulsability. The *rattenstrafe* is a wish—and thus an idealization—because it is far more comforting to the anal-sadistic structure of humanism than the reality of the free penetrability of the body along all of its irresolvably scaled estuaries.

Animality is not a state, essence, or genus, but a complex space cross-cut by voyages of all kinds. Trakl explores this wilderness terrain with an excruciating vulnerability. The animality which Trakl finds has its dead-ends and stagnant sums, it has its humanistic and theological becomings, but it also has its channels of open flow; becoming multiple, fluid, unpredictable, becoming an enemy of mankind, lupine and murine becomings of all kinds. These intensive sequences cannot be isolated or determined, since no impermeable boundary remains to quarantine Trakl's rodents from the nameless ones. From becoming a mouse, and then a black rat, and then a brown rat, or from becoming one's sister, and then a pack of wolves, and then a swarm of rats. The eternity of Rimbaud's inferior race shares its diseases with Nietzsche's "deep, deep, eternity," for which the very adjective is torn apart by convulsive waves of descent. An unfathomable abyss of regression or recurrence protracts itself epidemically into Trakl's body. "I am all the vermin in history." Indecent precipitation.

Abbreviations of Works Cited

All references to Jacques Derrida, *De l'esprit: Heidegger et al question* (Paris: Galilée, 1987); *Of Spirit: Heidegger and the Question*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), except:

- F: Sigmund Freud, *Studienausgabe, Band VII: Zwang, Paranoia, und Perversion* (Frankfurt am Main, 1982).
- HB: J.F.D. Shrewsbury, *A History of the Bubonic Plague in the British Isles* (Cambridge, 1970).
- Ib: Henrik Ibsen, *The Oxford Ibsen*, vol. 8 (London, 1966).
- R: Arthur Rimbaud, *Collected Poems* (Parallel Text), (Harmonds-worth, 1986).
- RLH: Hans Zinsser, *Rats, Lice, and History* (Boston, 1965).
- T: Georg Trakl, *Das dichterische Werk* (Salzburg, 1972).